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SUBJECT: ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS NEAR THE S.A.-MOZAMBIQUE
BORDER

SUMMARY

¶1. On an October 21-23 field visit to rural farming areas bordering Mozambique, emboffs investigated rights and labor concerns including trafficking in persons (TIP). The view from NGOs in the provincial capital was that law enforcement was not taking sex-related TIP seriously; and that labor TIP on farms, while believed to be limited, would likely go undetected by officials. Closer to the border, however, communities were more mobilized, and a recent TIP case had been tackled in a textbook example of public-private collaboration. Driven by the dedication of committed local individuals, NGOs, and churches, such pockets of grass-roots progress are popping up around South Africa. End Summary.

PESSIMISM ON TIP AT PROVINCIAL LEVEL

¶2. Emboffs' visit to rural Mpumalanga began in the provincial capital Nelspruit, where sources felt law enforcement officials were not taking TIP terribly seriously. At The Rural Action Committee (TRAC-MP), Mpumalanga's leading rural advocacy NGO, Human Rights Officer Elizabeth 'Maki' Molefe said trafficking from neighboring Mozambique was mostly for commercial sexual exploitation, and typical police response was to arrest and deport victims. Although wage violations were common on farms, Molefe said most abuses could not be characterized as TIP (or even forced labor), since migrants (perhaps half the labor force) worked voluntarily until they were denied benefits.

¶3. Labor inspectors were also seen as less than assiduous. Molefe bemoaned a general lack of government oversight of farms by SAG officials who preferred to remain in their comfortable offices in town. As a result, while TRAC believed incidence of labor TIP was low, it also felt the SAG would be unlikely to detect any cases that might occur. In the farmworkers' village of Nkomazi, Daphne Nkozi of the Community Legal Advice Office went further, alleging that labor inspectors were routinely bribed by farm owners with boxes of produce discreetly deposited in the trunks of their cars. (NOTE: Although we heard no accounts of labor trafficking, the Department of Labor (SADOL) seems to be touchy on the subject: when Pretoria headquarters learned of our appointment with the local SADOL director, it canceled the meeting with orders that only HQ could answer TIP queries. End Note.)

LOCALIZED EFFORTS TO RESCUE VICTIMS

¶4. Armed with these dim views, we were later gratified by more positive reports of localized anti-TIP action. In the

Tonga village of Nkomazi East, just 15 miles from the border, where Portuguese is a lingua franca and polling stations were set up for Mozambican elections, we learned of a TIP case earlier in the week which had elicited model responses from public and private actors. Rachel Nkosi of the Masisukumeni Women's Crisis Centre described how a 17-year-old Mozambican girl had fallen prey to a taxi scam, in which she was charged an exorbitant fare at the border post and then sold to a local man for 500 rand (\$65) who forced her to pay her "debt" through prostitution. When she became ill and was taken to a clinic, a vigilant nurse alerted the police and the Centre, who brought in social workers. Police not only tended to the girl at the station's victim support facility -- collecting forensic evidence and providing counseling -- but they also arrested the perpetrator.

VICTIMS' SUPPORT, AWARENESS RAISING

15. Traumatized but now safe, the Mozambican girl was staying at the Amazing Grace shelter in Malelane, which assists an array of victims from street children and orphans to victims of domestic abuse. Personnel Desmond and Given (LNU) described trafficking as an "organized crime" in the area, perpetrated by established criminal networks and with border officials on the take for bribes. Taxi scams from the border were common, in which migrants were either assessed with excessive fares which they were then forced to work off, or more often they were just dumped by the side of the road before reaching their destination of Johannesburg. Children of migrants were especially vulnerable during illegal border

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crossings, when they could be separated from their parents while hopping the electrified fence. Children, both South African and foreign, were trafficked as child minders in private households, with rescue dependent on tip-offs from neighbors.

16. Amazing Grace had forged a working partnership with police and government social workers to combat the problem. The shelter had also signed a formal agreement with police at the Komatipoort border post, who now proactively referred victims for assistance and were "serious" on the matter of TIP. Amazing Grace would be joining forces with the SAG's Department for Social Development, provincial premier's office, and police to organize awareness-raising events during South Africa's annual December "16 Days of Awareness" campaign to combat violence against women and children. The shelter also worked closely with local leaders from the Catholic Church and South African Council of Churches (SACC), who in turn had participated in TIP awareness workshops led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). NGOs had also organized a regional anti-TIP consortium -- called MPLIMO to cover Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces, and Mozambique border areas.

LOCAL HEROES, TURNING A TIDE

17. COMMENT: This patchwork pattern of action to combat TIP in Mpumalanga is representative of impressions from around South Africa. Broadly, the TIP issue receives uneven attention from government and police, in the absence of (pending) comprehensive legislation on TIP. Locally, however, there are pockets of progress, typically driven by passionate individuals (like Maki and Rachel) and standout NGOs (like Amazing Grace and their fellow MPLIMO members) who take initiative to mobilize more sluggish partners. At Amazing Grace, a "picketing" effort outside indifferent government offices led to formal memoranda and finally to firm partnership. While national bureaucrats chug along to draft laws and protocols, the grass roots are where the

action is. End Comment.
GIPS